

## October 16, 2006 - State Department Proposes New Rule for PASS Card Border Technology

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Department Proposes New Rule for PASS Card Border Technology

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today announced that the State Department has proposed a new card for travel to and from Canada. The proposed PASS Card is part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative being advocated for by the White House, the State Department, and the Department of Homeland Security.

The proposed PASS Card would cost a total of \$45 dollars for adults and \$35 for those under 16. The application process for a card would be the same as for a passport, meaning that under the proposed rule, a PASS Card would take between 4 and 6 weeks to obtain. Furthermore, the cards would employ radio frequency ID technology, similar to that used by the NEXUS card. Radio transmitters would allow the card to be read from roughly 20-30 feet away.

The State Department will be soliciting public comment on the proposal through December 18, 2006. Rep. Slaughter encourages all concerned citizens to submit their comments directly to one of her district offices, to her Washington, D.C. office, or through her Congressional website. Comments will be passed along in turn to the State Department.

Rep. Slaughter responded today to the State Department's announcement:

"While this proposed rule incorporates some of the changes we were hoping for, there are still problems that need to be addressed," the Congresswoman said. "The card's \$45 price tag is lower than the cost the State Department had previously advocated for, but it isn't low enough. The PACT Act that I authored would cap the price at a more affordable rate of \$20, recognizing that most Americans without passports won't pay more than \$25 to get a border ID card, if that."

Polls conducted by northern border chambers in February found that 30 percent of American northern border residents without a passport would be unwilling to pay more than \$25 for a new card, and 49 percent said they would refuse to pay anything. Consequently, nearly 80 percent of northern border residents who would need the PASS Card would be unwilling to pay for it at the price being suggested.

"Furthermore, the waiting period to obtain a card must be greatly reduced," Rep. Slaughter continued. "A four to six week waiting period will severely hinder the spontaneous tourism that is so critical to our local economy."

Studies have shown that occasional cross-border to Niagara decide visit the region on average 14 days before their trip.

## BACKGROUND ON WHTI

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 requires the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State to implement a plan called the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). WHTI, set to go into effect by

January 1, 2008, would require travelers re-entering the U.S. from Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean to present documents denoting both identity and citizenship. Congress recently moved to extend the deadline until June 2009 after a Government Accountability Office report commissioned by Rep. Slaughter showed that the Agencies had done little thus far to suggest that the program could be implemented effectively.

Rep. Slaughter believes that the Intelligence Reform bill gives DHS and State discretion to develop low-cost and easily obtainable documents for U.S. travelers. However, she remains deeply concerned that WHTI as envisioned is a flawed plan that would devastate US-Canada tourism and trade.

Rep. Slaughter has introduced bipartisan legislation to reform WHTI and make it work for Western New York. The bill, known as the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act, or PACT Act, has been endorsed by over one hundred organizations in the Buffalo-Niagara region.

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